

Message Text

SECRET

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 871
INFO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 1240

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS CHEROKEE

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR LEWIS

JERUSALEM EYES ONLY EXCLUSIVELY FOR ATHERTON

E. O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PBOR PDEV IS US XF
SUBJ: GUSH EMUNIM SETTLEMENT AT SHILO - MEETING WITH BEGIN

REFS: (A) STATE 19300, (B) TEL AVIV 1068

1. AFTER ROY ATHERTON AND I CONCLUDED OUR MEETING WITH BEGIN JAN 26 ON ARMS SALES ISSUES (SEPTTEL), I SPOKE ALONE WITH DAYAN TO MAKE THE POINTS IN REF A CONCERNING OUT ACUTE UNHAPPINESS ABOUT THE SHILO AFFAIR. SOMEWHAT EMBARRASSED, HE ASKED ME IF I WOULD MIND SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO BEGIN ABOUT IT AND OF COURSE I AGREED. DAYAN AND I THEN REJOINED BEGIN AND WEIZMAN WHILE THE REST OF THE GROUP REMAINED OUTSIDE BEGIN'S OFFICE.

2. I SAID TO BEGIN AND HIS COLLEAGUES THAT YOU WERE EXTREMELY UNHAPPY AND INDEED BAFFLED AT THE NEWS ABOUT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GUSH EMUNIM SETTLEMENT AT SHILO WITH APPARENT IDF ACQUIESCENCE. EVEN THOUGH THE
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SETTLEMENT WAS APPARENTLY NOT APPROVED BY THE GOVERNMENT, IT HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED WITH CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC FANFARE, MILITARY PROTECTION, AND THE PUBLIC SUPPORT OF AT LEAST SOME CABINET MEMBERS. IT DID NOT MEET EVEN THE MINIMAL DEFINITION OF A MILITARY CAMP, AND I TOLD BEGIN FLATLY THAT I THOUGHT THE GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO REMOVE IT WAS BOUND TO HAVE A VERY SERIOUS EFFECT ON

THE PRESIDENT'S AND YOUR ATTITUDES TOWARD THE CURRENT NEGOTIATING SITUATION. I TOOK THE LINE IN PARA TWO OF REFTEL A, BUT AUGMENTED IT WITH MY OWN CONCERN ABOUT BEGIN'S GOVERNMENT'S CREDIBILITY IN WASHINGTON IN LIGHT OF THIS ACTION.

3. BEGIN WAS AS UNHAPPY AND ONE WOULD EVEN SAY TORTURED OVER THIS SUBJECT AS I HAVE EVER SEEN HIM. HE SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD COMPLETELY THE DEPTH OF OUR REACTION, AND HE WOULD TELL ME IN COMPLETE FRANKNESS THE PROBLEM HE FACED. IT WAS AN ACUTE POLITICAL PROBLEM, AND AS HE KNEW PRESIDENT CARTER UNDERSTOOD SUCH POLITICAL PROBLEMS HE HOPED THAT SOMEHOW HE COULD UNDERSTAND THIS ONE.

4. BEGIN SAID THAT THE CABINET HAD APPROVED EXCAVATIONS OF A GENUINELY ARCHAEOLOGICAL NATURE BE MADE AT SHILO. AND THIS WAS ALL THAT HAD BEEN APPROVED. BUT THE GUSH EMUNIN HAD NOT HEEDED THE GOVERNMENT'S ADMONITIONS AND HAD GONE AHEAD TO ESTABLISH THE BEGINNINGS OF A SETTLEMENT. BEGIN SAID THAT HE COULD NOT BRING HIMSELF TO USE THE ARMY TO REMOVE THEM ONCE THEY HAD TAKEN THIS ACTION. HE WAS MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO USE "PERSUASION" TO GET THEM TO LEAVE, EMPLOYING THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT COALITION, PARTICULARLY
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YEHUDA BEN-MEIR, IN THIS EFFORT. HE WAS NOT SURE AT ALL THAT IT WOULD SUCCEED BUT THEY WERE MAKING A STRONG EFFORT TO PERSUADE THE SETTLERS THAT THEY MUST BE GUIDED BY GOVERNMENT DECISIONS RATHER THAN BY THEIR OWN CHOICE IN THIS DELICATE AFFAIR.

5. I THEN PRESSED BEGIN VERY HARD. I SAID THAT WE UNDERSTOOD THT HE HAD A POLITICAL PROBLEM, BUT NONE-
THELESS, NO MATTER HOW PERSUASIVE I WAS IN REPORTING OUR CONVERSATION, I COULD NOT HOPE TO PERSUADE YOU AND THE PRESIDENT THAT A STRONG PRIME MINISTER AT THE HEAD OF A STRONG GOVERNMENT LIKE HIS COULD NOT ENFORCE THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISIONS IF IT CHOOSES TO DO SO. I RECALLED THE EXAMPLE OF KADUM, WHERE THE LABOR GOVERNMENT DID NOT TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO REMOVE A WILDCAT SETTLEMENT, AND THEN COULD NEVER BRING ITSELF LATER TO DO SO BECAUSE OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE. CLEARLY, I SAID, IF THE GUSH EMUNIN GET AWAY WITH THIS ACTION, FLAGRANTLY VIOLATING THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO PUT NEW SETTLEMENTS IN THE WEST BANK ONLY INTO MILITARY CAMPS, THEY WILL HAVE

CARTE BLANCHE TO ESTABLISHMENT ADDITIONAL "FAIT ACCOMPLIS"
ELSEWHERE IN THE WEEKS TO COME. THIS IS A TEST CASE,
I SAID; IF YOU DO NOT MEET IT FIRMLY NOW, THEN HOW WOULD
YOU MEET IT LATER?

6. BEGIN ADMITTED SADLY THE LOGIC OF MY ARGUMENTS. BUT
HE INSISTED THAT HE HAD REAL AND DEEP POLITICAL PROBLEMS
RIGHT AT PRESENT WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY, WHERE HE IS BEING
ATTACKED DAILY FOR "GIVING AWAY THE SINAI" AND FOR
"ABANDONING HIS HISTORIC CLAIM TO SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE
WEST BANK." HE QUOTED SOME OF THE ATTACKS BEING MADE
ON HIM, AND SINGLED OUT GEULA COHEN'S RECENT REMINDER
IN PUBLIC OF HIS "IMMORAL ACTION" IN AUTHORIZING THE
USE OF THE ARMY TO PREVENT A GUSH EMUNIN SETTLEMENT NEAR
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JERICO LAST AUTUMN. HE REMINDED ME THAT THAT DECISION
HAD BEEN THE MOST DIFFICULT HE HAD HAD TO MAKE DURING
HIS TERM OF OFFICE, AND THAT IT HAD LED WITHIN TWO OR
THREE DAYS TO HIS SECOND HOSPITALIZATION FOR A RECUR-
ENCE OF HIS HEART CONDITION. HE SAID, PLEADINGLY,
"SAM, YOU KNOW WHAT THAT DECISION COST ME." I CANNOT
USE THE ARMY AGAIN; TO EVICT THEM PHYSICALLY WOULD BE
A GRAVE MISTAKE. WE WILL DO OUR BEST BY PERSUASION, BUT
I CANNOT USE FORCE."

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 872

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WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 1240

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS CHEROKEE

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR LEWIS

JERUSALEM EYES ONLY EXCLUSIVELY FOR ATHERTON

7. FROM THIS POINT ON THE CONVERSATION BECAME AN EXTRAORDINARY ARGUMENT BETWEEN DAYAN AND BEGIN, WITH WEIZMAN ESSENTIALLY SUPPORTING DAYAN'S VIEW BUT TRYING TO BE LOYAL AND SYMPATHETIC TO BEGIN AT THE SAME TIME. DAYAN SAID TO THE PRIME MINISTER: "I ARGUED STRONGLY AGAINST ALLOWING THAT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE TO BE APPROVED, FOR WE ALL MUST HAVE KNOWN IT WOULD BE ONLY A SUBTERFUGE. THE GUSH PEOPLE ARE NOT ARCHEOLOGISTS; THEY ARE SETTLERS. AND WE ALL KNEW IT." BEGIN TRIED TO REBUT DAYAN BY QUOTING SOME DIFFERENT STATEMENTS BACK TO HIM WHICH HE, DAYAN, APPARENTLY MADE IN THE CABINET MEETING ON THIS SUBJECT. BUT FUNDAMENTALLY, ALL THREE WERE ADMITTING BEFORE ME THEIR SEEMING HELPLESSNESS IN THE FACE OF THEIR POLITICAL PROBLEM. THEY WERE TURNING TO ME TO TRY TO EXPLAIN THE POLITICAL DILEMMA BETTER TO PRESIDENT CARTER AND TO YOU. BUT I GAVE THEM NO HOPE THAT I OR ANYONE ELSE COULD EXPLAIN IT VERY CONVINCINGLY.

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8. THE MEETING ENDED ON THIS UNHAPPY NOTE, WITH MY SAYING AGAIN THAT I THOUGHT BEGIN SHOULD THINK VERY CAREFULLY ABOUT THE PRECEDENT HE WAS SETTING. IF HE COULD NOT MOVE NOW, I DID NOT SEE HOW HE COULD MOVE IN THE FUTURE AND THE AUTHORITY OF HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD BE UNDERMINED ACCORDINGLY.

9. AS I WAS LEAVING THE BUILDING A LITTLE WHILE LATER, EZER WEIZMAN TOOK ME ASIDE TO SAY CRYPTICALLY: "I AM GOING TO TRY MY BEST TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT DAMNED SHILO SITUATION. I HAVE AN IDEA, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF IT WILL WORK. I'LL DO MY BEST." THEN HE QUICKLY DROVE AWAY.

10. COMMENT: IN THE EIGHT MONTHS I HAVE BEEN HERE, THIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY MEETINGS I HAVE ATTENDED. IT WAS AS IF I WAS BEING UNEXPECTEDLY ADMITTED TO THE BEDROOM WHILE HUSBAND AND WIFE WERE IN THE MIDDLE ON A PAINFUL MARITAL ARGUMENT. I DO NOT DOUBT THE DEPTH OF ANGUISH THIS ISSUE IS CAUSING BEGIN AND HIS COLLEAGUES. THEY CERTAINLY UNDERSTAND OUR FEELINGS AND I DID NOT SPARE THEM IN ANY SENSE FROM THE PROBABILITY THAT THE REACTION IN

WASHINGTON WOULD BE EXTREMELY ADVERSE TO WHAT HAS
HAPPENED. BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE BEGIN WILL INDEED AGAIN
USE FORCE TO REMOVE GUSH EMUNIN SETTLEMENTS. I HOPE
WEIZMAN COMES UP WITH SOME OTHER SOLUTION, ALTHOUGH I
CANNOT IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD BE. ALL IN ALL, THIS
EPISODE IS SYMBOLIC OF THE DOMESTIC DIFFICULTIES BEGIN
HAS GOTTEN INTO OVER HIS EFFORT TO BECOME A NATIONAL
LEADER RATHER THAN PURELY A SECTARIAN ONE. AS INDICATED
IN SOME PREVIOUS MESSAGES, FOR HIM TO IGNORE THE VIEWS
OF HIS CLOSEST IDEOLOGICAL COMPATRIOTS IN THE BROADER
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NATIONAL INTEREST IS SHEER HELL FOR HIM. AND I DO NOT
BELIEVE ONE CAN UNDERESTIMATE THE PHYSICAL EFFECT IT HAS
OR WILL HAVE UPON HIM AS HE TRIES TO BALANCE HIS
OBLIGATIONS TO HIS CURRENT POSITION AND TO HIS DEEPEST
CONVICTIONS. LEWIS

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